

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scene

New York Theatre Openings This Week

Be Your Age-48th St Theatre 1/14/53. Alexander H. Cohen and Joseph Kipness in association with Morris K. Bauer present a new comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham. Conrad Nagel, Loring Smith, Mildy Parks featured, cast directed by Mr. Denham. ...The Love of Four Colonels-Shubert 1/15/53. Theatre Guild and Aldrich & Myers present a new comedy by Peter Ustinov. Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer star, Mr. Harrison directed.

Digests of Current Reviews

The Children's Hour-Coronet 12/18/52. Two weekly reviewers filed "con" verdicts against Lillian Hellman's 1934 hit play produced by Kermit Bloomingarden, while one weekly critic joined majority in praising it as a moving, timely drama. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, found play is still a sharp study of malevolence, and a sound piece of theatre craftsmanship. His only criticism was that Iris Mann and Patricia Neal both overacted. Marshall, Nation, panned it as grand guignol, not as human tragedy it aimed it. Critic finds it hard to believe that the monster's course would be so consistently complemented and furthered by every human being she has to deal with. The result is a sense of contrivance which enters early in the script. Bentley, New Republic, also felt everything on stage seemed unreal, inorganic, unrelated to everything else. This absence of genuine passion was noted not only in the individual characters, but in the entire production staged by the author.

Two's Company-Alvin 12/15/52. The dance numbers in the new musical revue starring Bette Davis are the best item in the show, most of the daily and weekly drama critics agreed. Herald Tribune dance critic Terry makes it official by cheering for the dance numbers of Nora Kaye, Maria Karnilova and Bill Callahan as not only show stoppers, but rating as some of the most delightful dance work seen in a Broadway revue in a long time. Jerome Robbins has created brilliantly for them and for his large dance ensemble, commented Terry. Kaye he rated as a very special artist of the theatre of ballet who fits perfectly into such a musical comedy. George Jean Nathan, Keating, Cue, and Hewes, Saturday Review, latest weekly reviewers to vote against the Russo & Ellis musical, mostly because of complete lack of talent of Miss Davis and the complete lack of worthwhile sketches and/or songs.

Out of Town Tryouts

Despite competent production and a good cast, sum total of James W. Elliot's revival of Mary Roberts Rinehart's mystery drama The Bat comes through as mild entertainment, Bone, Variety, commented after New Haven debut. ZaSu Pitts and Lucile Watson head cast...Mid-Summer, new comedy by Vina Delmar, looks like better film fare than theatre, comments Eck, Variety, after Hartford viewing. Much rewriting needed before Broadway debut, he suggested, to correct directorial miss.

News & Notes

Thornton Wilder profiled in Time...San Francisco Drama Critics named The Fourposter best play presented in 1952, with Darkness at Noon and The Lady's Not For Burning as runners up...William McDermott, Cleveland Plain Dealer, honored by Cleveland Press Club. August Biehle presented him with a portrait...American Theatre in St. Louis ended its segregation policy, Times reports...George Tabori's new play The Emperor's Clothes makes its pre-Broadway debut at Wayne University, Detroit.

' Off Broadway '

Dramatists Forum resumed weekly Thursday meetings at Amato Theatre with reading of Joel Turner's The Grapes of Prosperine...New Playwrights have acquired untitled play by Ossie Davis for an Off Broadway production in the middle of next month...Noone, Gil Orlovitz new play sponsored by Intro Magazine at Provincetown Playhouse, opened 4 days later than scheduled...Village Light Opera Group presented Gilbert & Sullivan's The Pirates of Penzance at Xavier Theatre, 40 West 16th St, NYC, for benefit of scholarship fund of St Hilda's School...City College's Theatre Workshop produced W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's The Ascent of F6 at Pauline Edwards Theatre, East 23rd St, NYC...Dramatic Workshop presenting Abie's Irish Rose Jan 15-17 at 1639 Broadway, NYC...Archibald MacLeish gave a Sunday night reading of his poems at Circle--in-the Square. Group will produce his newest play The Trojan Horse...Amato Opera Theatre has resumed week end performances, now playing Aida each Fri, Sat and Sun...Well meaning Off Broadway Revue is how Rice, Post, rated Ben Victor's Merry Go Round, presented at Amato Theatre. Poor sketch material and wasted motion propelling revue in no given direction blamed. Joan Talbert, Ted Maurer and Betty Lester were named best in large cast. Most of sketch and comedy material were used as lead ins to songs...Dakota, Originals Only long run revue, may be performed overseas at Air Force Bases, Tom Hill told Shanley, Times..."Theodore", who tells his ghost stories at various Off Broadway theatres at week end midnight performances, is interviewed in current Theatre Arts.

' Vaudeville '

Current Palace bill, the final before the Danny Kaye show, features Bruce Howard, Frankie Marlowe, Karpis Trio, Stuffy Bryant, Leonardo and Anita, Marilyn Murphy, and Arriola Family...Danny Kaye will occupy the Palace stage for the entire second half of his All Star International Variety Show opening Jan 18. Darvas and Julia, Fran Warren, The Dunhills, Marquis and Family and Peiro Brothers will be seen in the first half..."Dancing Waters", new Radio City Music Hall revue opening Jan 15, features a giant fountain shooting water 30 feet in air from 4000 jets. Fountain was imported from West German Industrial Exhibition...Danny Thomas and Peggy Lee will appear on-stage at premiere of "The Jazz Singer" at Paramount Jan 13. New stage bill includes Carmen Cavallero and his orchestra, Larry Storch and Toy and Wing.

' Children's Theatre '

Clare Tree Major presents Heidi at Brooklyn Institute Academy of Music Jan 17 at 3 PM...Playmart Children's Theatre presents Aladdin and His Lamp Saturdays at 1 PM and 2 45 PM and Sunday at 2 45 PM at Carl Fischer Concert Hall, 165 West 57th, NYC...Junior Theatre presents Hansel and Gretel Saturdays at 2 15 PM at Carnegie Recital Hall.

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DU MONT TV "Broadway Matinee" features "CD" ratings NY theatre day after openings

NATHAN-PRO & CON...Despite what the producers of bad plays think, George Jean Nathan really loves the theatre, Keating, Cue, noted in prospects for the 1953 theatre season...But Colby, Journal Of Commerce, isn't so sure. On her Du Mont TV "Broadway Matinee" she charged him with having a complete lack of understanding of the kind of plays the audience enjoys. Nathan, who she admitted does have a flair for epigrams, hasn't smiled in the theatre for years. She classed him as a dyspeptic critic who doesn't aid the theatre at all.

EDITORIAL PAGE COMMENTS...It would be fitting for theatre lovers everywhere to reach a helping hand across the footlights by contributing to the care of members of the acting profession who themselves have given so much pleasure by their performances in the theatre, urged NY Times editorial page in support of the Actors Fund collection. ...Time has come to act about new playhouses on Broadway, states Herald Tribune editorial. Next step is for NYC Councilman Quinn to reintroduce the necessary bills, let the City Council enact them, and then see what new builders emerge upon the scene. Any people who now begin to raise obstacles will have to be put down as obstructionists.

COLUMN TIPS...TV networks planning to scout community and college theatres for new faces for TV shows, reports Walker...Jean Dalrymple considering starring Franchot Tone in October Gal, whispers Gardner...New Faces shows what a few really bright ideas and fresh material can do when Broadway producers will stand for them, quips Phillips, World Telegram & Sun.

SULLAVAN RECORD...Injustice being done Margaret Sullavan in press and elsewhere because of misunderstanding of her Christmas eve vacation, McCord, Herald Tribune, explains. When star signed Deep Blue Sea contract it was stipulated that she could have the week before Christmas off. When show received mixed notices it was obvious that such a leave would kill the show, so she compromised on just spending Christmas eve with her family. Management had misunderstood contract and sold tickets to matinee.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...NY bus strike may be headache to commuters, but it is a blessing to Broadway, points out Sylvester, News. Times Square is now fit to travel through and cabs get places at 1/3 the usual fare...Australian writer Ruth Park will soon be snatched up by Broadway or Hollywood, predicts WNBC Leon Pearson. Author of "The Witch's Thorn" finds words that sing and tales that thrill, he praised.

WAY OFF BROADWAY. Water Lily, N.C. has a population of 125, one store, a gas station and 13 TV sets. But last week it played host to Watts, Post, and Morehouse, WT&S, spending their free time between plays hunting. Post critic wasn't surprised that he wasn't allowed to forget the drama even there. Visitor demanded to know why critics pan shows the public likes, such as Abie's Irish Rose.

MAIL BAG...Press agent Richard Maney took pen and paper to answer Chapman, News, charge that nobody ever drinks bourbon, rye, Manhattan or Martinis on stage. Tain't so in The Moon is Blue Donald Cook and Barry Nelson have mixed 6804 martinis since opening night...Equity warned by summer theatre producer Lewis Harmon, via letter in Variety, that the members had better wake up or they will find their policy makers diminishing summer theatre by forcing 5 full days of rehearsal for summer shows. Result will be stars will form more of their own package companies.

Shows that closed include Mrs. McThing and My Darlin' Aida...Hellinger Theatre will use 51st St entrance instead of Broadway...Iva Withers succeeds Vivian Blaine, Guys and Dolls, June 1; while Isabel Bigley leaves same show Feb 28.

' ANTA Forum on High Theatre Costs '

High costs alone will never destroy the theatre, ANTA forum members of "Are High Costs Destroying the American Theatre and the faith of the Angels" agreed at meeting sponsored by Greater NY Chapter of ANTA. Benjamin Kaye, ANTA Board member, acted as chairman. Forum included producers Kermit Bloomgarden, Gertrude Macy and Leonard Sillman, William Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun critic, and Milton Weintraub, secretary-treasurer of Association of Theatre Press Agents and Managers.

Increased costs may not destroy the theatre, Bloomgarden explained, but they will only lead to higher costs. Only way to stop the rise in costs and to get more productions, he believes, is for all departments of theatre to discuss and find ways of bringing costs down. Each group must end its selfish views. If they don't find such a way, new producers will not have a chance to raise money for productions. The producer of The Children's Hour praised the Dramatists' Guild for making the first attempt to solve the problem by lowering their royalties until the backers investment is returned.

Lack of productions and producers make for high theatre costs today, noted Sillman. New Faces producer wishes more producers were available who really knew the theatre. His own definition of a producer is one who knows how to buy and bargain, and isn't afraid of the unions. Sillman is in box office of his theatre nightly at 7 30 PM and sees each performance from back of house. Now he knows that while all his life he wanted a hit, it is very difficult to keep a hit a hit. Producer is also convinced that anything good will be a success, but something must be done about unfair union demands which are cutting down the number of productions.

Admitting that he knew nothing about theatre costs, Hawkins commented that theatre is losing a large part of its audience by not producing the straight mystery and straight romantic play which used to be so popular. This kind of play also gave good training in the theatre to all kinds of theatre workers. World Telegram & Sun critic read letter from unnamed playwright who is sorry the NY critics made fun of his present occupation of TV writer in their recent criticisms of his short lived play. Playwright simply asked what writer of dramas is supposed to live on between productions.

Audiences don't buy unions or production costs, Weintraub stated. They buy good theatre and prices are secondary. Union officer developed case to prove that theatre production costs and ticket prices have raised much less in past 40 years than other items in the cost of living scale. Production costs are never too high for hits, he said, but they are too high for failures. He knows of no other business where investor can be repaid and start earning a profit at the end of 10 weeks, as is possible in the production of a straight play. Answer to problem is not lower costs, but an educational program to get more people into theatre, he concluded.

Backers today have the wrong attitude when they feel they are actually making money when they really only break even, Macy argued. Until backers demand an actual profit and return from their investment, theatre will never bother finding ways to cut costs. Producer praised efforts of Howard Cullman in fighting for new theatre building codes. She also added plaudits to move of Dramatists Guild. One way she believes unions could help is by not requiring more men than are needed. In her production of I've Got Sixpence she was forced to hire 6 assistant electricians.

' Record Notes '

Columbia has recorded Paris 190 by Cornelia Otis Skinner on a single LP...RCA Victor will record original cast in Two's Company...Walden Records will release "Lyrics by Ira Gershwin" album...Decca issuing "Danny Kaye at Palace" album.

